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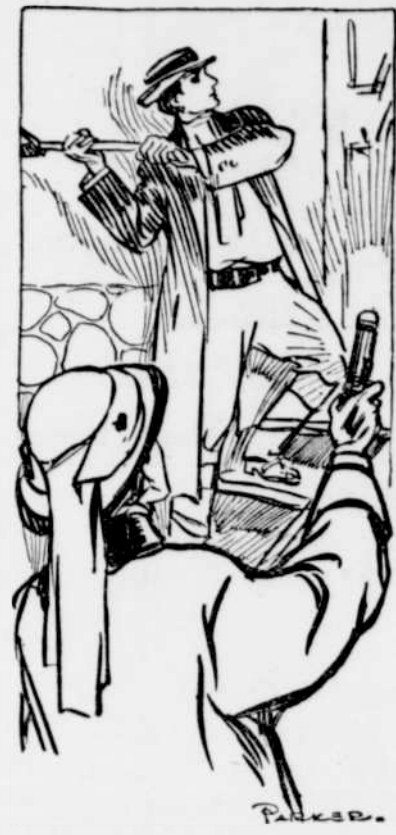
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BY GEORGE HARR McCUTCHEON

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Shaw Swung the Ax Vigorously.

"Renwood's," he called back. Their position was untenable. He was drenched; the raincoats protected her as she crouched back into the most remote corner. Looking about, he discovered a small door leading to the cellar. It opened the instant he touched the latch. "Come, quick," he cried, lifting her to her feet. "In here—stoop! I have the light. This is the cellar. I'll have to break down a door leading to the upper part of the house, but that will not be difficult. Here's an ax or two. Good Lord, I'm soaked!"

"Where are we going?" she gasped as he drew her across the earthen floor.

"Upstairs. It's comfortable up there." They were at the foot of the narrow stairway. She held back.

"Never! It's the—haunted house! I can't—Randolph."

"Pooh! Don't be afraid. I'm with you, dearest."

"I know," she gulped. "But you have only one arm. Oh, I can't!"

"It's all nonsense about ghosts. I've slept here twenty times, Penelope. People have seen my light and my shadow, that's all. I'm a pretty substantial ghost."

"Oh, dear, what a disappointment! And there are no spooks, not even Mrs. Renwood?"

"Of course she may come back, dear, but you'd hardly expect a respectable lady spook to visit the place with me stopping here. Even ghosts have regard for conventionalities. She couldn't—"

"How much more respectable than I," Penelope murmured plaintively.

"Forgive me," he implored.

"I would, only you are so wet."

The door above was locked, but Shaw swung the ax so vigorously that any but a very strong nerved ghost must have been frightened to death once more.

"It's my house, you know," he explained from the top step. "There we are! Come up, Penelope. The fort is yours."

She followed him into the hall above. In silence they walked along the bare floors through empty rooms until at last he opened a door in what proved to be the left wing. To her surprise this room was comfortably furnished. There were ashes in the big fireplace, and there were lamps which had been used recently, for they were filled with oil.

"Here's where I read sometimes," he explained. "I have slept on that couch. Last winter I came up here to hunt. My cottage wasn't finished so I stayed here. I'll confess I've heard strange sounds—now, don't shiver! Once or twice I've been a bit nervous, but I'm still alive, you see." He lighted the wicks in the two big lamps while she looked on with chills creeping up and down her back. "I'll have a bully fire in the fireplace in just a minute."

"Let me help you," she suggested, coming quite close to him with uneasy glances over her shoulders.

Ten minutes later they were sitting before a roaring fire, quite content even though there was a suggestion of **amazed ghosts lurking in the hallway** behind them. No doubt old man Grimes and his wife, if they awoke in the course of the night, groaned deep prayers in response to the bright light from the windows of the haunted house. Shaw and Penelope smiled securely as they listened to the howling storm outside.

"Well, this is trespassing," she said, beaming a happy smile upon him.

"I shall be obliged to drive you out, alas," he said reflectively. "Do you recall my vow? As long as you are a Bazelhurst, I must perforce eject you."

"Not tonight!" she cried in mock dismay.

"But, as an alternative, you'll not

be a Bazelhurst long," he went on eagerly, suddenly taking her hands into his, forgetful of the wounded left. "I'm going to try trespassing myself. Tomorrow I'm going to see your brother. It's regular, you know. I'm going to tell the head of your clan that you are coming over to Shaw, heart and hand."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "You—you—no, no! You must not do that!"

"But, my dear, you are going to marry me."

"Yes—I—suppose so," she murmured helplessly. "That isn't what I meant. I mean it isn't necessary to ask Cecil. Ask me; I'll consent for him."

Half an hour passed. Then he went to the window and looked out into the storm.

"You must lie down and get some sleep," he insisted, coming back to her. "The storm's letting up, but we can't leave here for quite a while. I'll sit up and watch. I'm too happy to sleep." She protested, but her heavy eyes were his allies. Soon he sat alone before the fire; she slept sound on the broad couch in the corner, a steamer rug across her knees. A contented smile curved his lips as he gazed reflectively into the flames. He was not thinking of Mrs. Renwood's amiable ghost.

How long she had been asleep Penelope did not know. She awoke with a start, her flesh creeping. A nameless dread came over her; she felt that she was utterly alone and surrounded by horrors. It was a full minute—a sickening hour, it seemed—before she realized that she was in the room with the man she loved. Her frightened eyes caught sight of him lying back in the chair before the dying fire in the chimney place. The lights were low, the shadows gaunt and chill.

A terrified exclamation started to her lips. Her ears again caught the sound of some one moving in the house—some alien visitor. There was no mistaking the sound—the distant, sepulchral laugh and the shuffling of feet, almost at the edge of the couch. It seemed.

"Randolph!" she whispered hoarsely. The man in the chair did not move. She threw off the blanket and came to a sitting posture on the side of the couch, her fingers clutching the covering with tense horror. Again the soft, rumbling laugh and the sound of foot steps on the stairway. Like a flash she sped across the room and clutched frantically at Randolph's shoulders. He awoke with an exclamation, staring bewildered into the horrified face above.

"The—the ghost!" she gasped, her eyes glued upon the hall door. He leaped to his feet and threw his arms about her.

"You've had a bad dream," he said. "What a beast I was to fall asleep. Lord, you're frightened half out of your wits. Don't tremble so, dearest. There's no ghost. Every one knows—"

"Listen—listen!" she whispered. Together they stood motionless, almost breathless before the fire, the glow from which threw their shadows across the room to meet the mysterious invader.

"Good Lord," he muttered, unwilling to believe his ears. "There is some one in the house. I've—I've heard sounds here before, but not like these." Distinctly to their startled ears came the low, subdued murmur of a human voice and then unmistakable moans from the very depth of the earth—from the grave, it seemed.

"Do you hear?" she whispered. "Oh, this dreadful place! Take me away, Randolph, dear!"

"Don't be afraid," he said, drawing her close. "There's nothing supernatural about those sounds. They come from lips as much alive as ours. I'll investigate." He grabbed the heavy poker from the chimney corner and started toward the door. She followed close behind, his assurance restoring in a measure the courage that had temporarily deserted her.

In the hallway they paused to look out over the broad porch. The storm had died away, sighing its own requiem in the misty treetops. Dawn was not far away. A thick fog was rising to meet the first glance of day. In surprise Shaw looked at his watch, her face at his shoulder. It was after 5 o'clock.

"Ghosts turn in at midnight, dear," he said, with a cheerful smile. "They don't keep such hours as these."

"But who can it be? There are no tramps in the mountains," she protested, glancing over her shoulder apprehensively.

"Listen! By Jove, that voice came from the cellar."

"And the lock is broken," she exclaimed. "But how silly of me! Ghosts don't stop for locks."

"I'll drop the bolts just the same," he said as they hurried down the hallway. At the back stairs they stopped and listened for many minutes. Not a sound came up to them from below. Softly he closed the door and lowered two heavy bars into place. "If there's any one down there they probably think they've heard spooks trotting around up here."

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